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2014-12

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Naval Postgraduate School (U.S.)

Monterey, California: Naval Postgraduate School.

<http://hdl.handle.net/10945/44068>



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ODNI, Coast Guard Speakers Discuss Intelligence Initiatives

Monterey CA - December 2014



Two guest speakers at the Center of Homeland Defense and Security in October discussed the importance of vigilance and agility of the National Intelligence Community, as well as discussion new initiatives by each agency.

Rear Admiral (ret) Rosanne Levitre, Chairman of the National Intelligence Management Council, and Daniel Butler, Coast Guard Deputy Assistant Commandant, Intelligence and Criminal Investigations provided a substantive overview of Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and U.S. Coast Guard activities and initiatives germane to Homeland Defense.

The pair spoke to students in the Special Topics in American Government for Homeland Security taught by Kathleen Kiernan and Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez of the CHDS faculty.

Among her topics of discussion, LeVitre explained how NIMs directly contribute to keeping key homeland security officials informed and then highlighted an important, new ODNI-led initiative.

Specifically, the ODNI is focused on producing tailored threat assessments concerning the nation's critical infrastructure. The threat assessments will be based on the information requirements provided by the Federal Agencies designated as Critical Infrastructure Sector Leads by Presidential Policy Directive 21 (PPD-21).

The directive identifies 16 different critical infrastructure areas, ranging from communications and transportation to food (agriculture), nuclear programs and information technology. ODNI will work with numerous federal partners and Levitre asked students working at all levels of governance to offer their input.

"The assessments have to be meaningful and must reflect partnership between those of us who work foreign intelligence and those who work within federal state, local and tribal organizations," she said during an interview following her presentation. "What I took away from the students was a lot of very good ideas and responses to our project. The input was very useful and I am taking that information back with me along with some new professional contacts."

Butler discussed the concept of meta-cognition and macro-meta-cognition, or how an organization thinks as well as how disparate groups think in order to work in a synchronized fashion.

That is important to the Coast Guard as it is tasked with securing the nation's ports, a chore that requires collaboration with multiple government agencies and private enterprise to combat threats from fires to oil spills or natural disasters. The myriad actors must work together in constrained spaces common to port configurations.

"It's (meta-cognition) a terrific topic from the Coast Guard perspective because one of the things we count upon is receiving information from diverse sources," Butler said. "There are a number of actors who have to work in concert, particularly in the port environment. For that to be done efficiently and to not make the disaster worse, to make it a non-event, requires synchronized, collaborative action."

Also important is employing non-traditional information sources such as recreational boaters or fisherman who are more likely to know an anomaly when they see it. Intelligence-gathering increasingly relies on both creativity as well as analytics, said Kiernan.

"Imagination and creativity have always been thought of as soft skills while we (CHDS) think they are hard skills that you can put into the bureaucratic thinking and analysis," she said. "To me that is street craft. There are threats hiding in plain sight, but we may not have context to view them as threats."

To improve its intelligence program the Coast Guard recently established an Intelligence Fellow Program that exposes promising young officers, enlisted, and civilian employees of Coast Guard Intelligence to the intelligence community at the national level and challenges them to take a fresh and creative look at critical missions and emerging technologies.

The first cohort of Coast Guard Intelligence Fellows is examining how to use and integrate "crowd sourcing" technologies, social media, and traditional sources of intelligence to achieve "shared synchronized situational awareness," or "macro-meta-cognition" in a maritime environment like a busy commercial port or bay. Established by Coast Guard Rear Admiral Christopher J. Tomney, Assistant Commandant for Intelligence and Criminal Investigations, the first cohort began the year-long program in October.



Rosanne Levitre, Kathleen Kiernan and Daniel Butler



“In Admiral Tomney’s words, they will inherit the Coast Guard Intelligence enterprise we oversee now,” Butler said. “They are going to be running the place in 10 to 15 years and we want them to figure out what they want to be running.”